

**IHO Centenary Celebrations, Monaco, 21 June 2021.
Remarks by Ambassador Peter Thomson,
UNSG's Special Envoy for the Ocean**

Your Serene Highness
Secretary-General
Director-General
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to be with you here in Monaco today, a sensation that is tempered by the reality of a world in which wide swathes are still ravaged by the Covid-19 pandemic. We are all connected, a lesson crystalized by the pandemic; thus our thoughts, and indeed our vaccine resources, must be with those who are at the frontlines of combatting Covid-19.

In thinking about the pandemic's frontlines, how often over the last year, one has had good cause to recall the conclusion of Albert Camus's *La Peste*, when he wrote that what we learn in a time of pestilence, is there are more things to admire in men than to despise.

Please forgive the sombre tone of my opening words, but I feel it's my duty to repeat the remarks of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, who announced at the Blue COP in Madrid that we are wilfully destroying the life support systems of this planet; and in a more recent speech on the State of the Planet, said that humanity has been at war with Nature, and that it's is time for us to make peace.

I bend our thoughts now to the Ocean with my oft-repeated mantra of, "No healthy planet without a healthy Ocean, and the Ocean's health is currently in decline".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To illustrate that decline, I point to the wonder of coral, and in doing so bow to the global leadership of His Serene Highness and the Principality of Monaco, who through ICRI and other admirable initiatives, are spearheading our struggle to save coral reefs.

The IPCC has reported with a high degree of conference that we will lose 70 to 90% of tropical coral reefs when global temperatures arrive at 1.5 degrees Celsius. Meanwhile, WMO reports that we are still on track for well over 3 degrees Celsius by the end of this century.

Coming from an island ringed by a mighty coral reef, I for one, on behalf of my grandchildren, refuse that future. The security of humanity on this planet may well be existentially linked to the fate of coral, thus we all have work to do.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the decade ahead, we have a universally agreed blueprint to work to. I refer to the Paris Climate Agreement and the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals. If we implement these in full, we will indeed make peace with Nature.

As you well know, the fourteenth Sustainable Development Goal sets out to conserve and sustainably use the Ocean's resources. It would not be out of place for me to say that like the other sixteen goals, we are still behind the eight ball when it comes to SDG14's implementation.

It has become increasingly obvious as we endeavour to introduce a truly sustainable blue economy, that Ocean science must be the foundation upon which the achievement of SDG14 is built.

In this regard, it is an astounding situation, when you consider that the Ocean contains the majority of life on this planet, covers around 70% of the planet's surface and produces over 50% of the planet's oxygen, that the majority of the Ocean's properties remain unknown to science and around 80% of the seafloor remains unsurveyed.

We expect that deficit to be overcome now that the UN Decade of Ocean Science has been launched. In the years ahead, we will have some very important decisions to make about our relationship with this planet, and we will need to take those decisions on the basis of the most trustworthy and comprehensive scientific findings available.

Thus, given the status of the Ocean and our relationship with it, full scientific knowledge of its properties is absolutely necessary. For this reason alone, the UN Decade of Ocean Science assumes profound importance for us all.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is this context that I believe the International Hydrographic Organisation assumes new and heightened responsibilities. All that I have said this morning, rings the bell of an all-hands-on-deck alarm to avoid a planetary shipwreck.

The IHO is the trusted hand supporting the safety of our navigation out on the great Ocean and through the waterways upon which we travel. In the one hundred years of its existence, countless lives and boundless commerce have been saved through its diligent processes, setting standards to promote uniformity in nautical charts and documents, coordinating the activities of national hydrographic offices, and providing best practice in marine surveying and use of hydrographic information.

Together with its sister organisations, the IMO, WMO, and IOC-UNESCO, the International Hydrographic Organisation stands as an enduring proof-positive of the benefits of multilateralism and international cooperation. On behalf of Secretary-General Guterres and the UN as a whole, I give thanks and congratulations to the International Hydrographic Organisation for one hundred years of tireless pursuit of its mandate on behalf of the best interests of people and planet.

It is not meant as a play on words when I say the IHO underlies all our Ocean work. But is the seafloor, the depth of channels and the existence of hazardous reefs the extent of what IHO can bring to the avoidance of a planetary shipwreck? I think not.

Through and over those channels and reefs run currents and tides, and the wondrous ecology of the seafloor is inextricably tied to the water column it supports. Think for a moment of a bottom-dwelling shrimp. It and its ecological surrounds, recognize no legal distinction between the seafloor and the water column it supports; but jump a couple of inches and the shrimp moves from one human legal regime into another. When we call for an end to siloed thinking, let's mean what we say.

Between SDG14.a's agreed target of increasing scientific knowledge, developing research capacity and transferring marine technology; and the UN Decade of Ocean Science's aim of giving us the science we need for the Ocean we want, there is much more that IHO can contribute to our great task of reversing the decline in which the Ocean's health has been caught.

Your Serene Highness,
Secretary-General,
Director-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I hope my words today have stimulated some thought about IHO integral place in resetting humankind's relationship with the Ocean. With the principle of sustainability always as our lodestar, and the UN Decade of Ocean Science as the flag-bearer of SDG14.a's target of increasing scientific knowledge to improve the Ocean's health, I urge the IHO onwards.

Hydrography in its broadest sense has the potential to measure and monitor Ocean data on the vast global scale required and to provide this data to scientists to interpret, under the Decade's UN -designated leadership of IOC-UNESCO.

We are challenged by Ocean acidification, deoxygenation, warming, sea level rise, and chemical and plastic pollution, to mention just a few of the Ocean's travails, so I appeal to the hydrographers of the world to play their full part in monitoring what are fundamental elements of the Ocean's health and our own.

In a year's time, we will gather at the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon, co-hosted by the governments of Kenya and Portugal, to consider how we are faring with the implementation of SDG14. I was in Lisbon last week meeting with Portuguese authorities to discuss preparations for the conference, and as a result am convinced that like the first UN Ocean Conference, the Lisbon conference will create a bright new chapter of action to restore and protect the Oceans well-being.

I hope to see hydrography prominent in the mix of innovations and solutions forthcoming from next year's UN Ocean Conference in order to give us data we require, for the science we need, for the Ocean we want.

I thank you for your kind attention to my remarks.
